DECISION RECORD

NM-060-2001-0065

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten-year grazing lease of public lands to Julian and George Lopez on Allotment #62025. The lease will allow 5 Animal Units yearlong at 100 % Public Land for 60 Animal Unit Months.

The condition of the public lands within this livestock grazing allotment has been reviewed for conformance with the Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Currently, the condition of the public lands and the management of livestock grazing conform to the Standards and Guidelines.

The parameters for measuring public land health, however, have yet to be developed for Standards and Guidelines. When these parameters are delineated, the Roswell Field Office will again review the public land health of this allotment and will document its findings in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The document would include analysis of any changes from the Proposed Action.

Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the attached environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed action were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. Please be specific in your points of protest. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470). The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

/s/ T R Kreager
T. R. Kreager,
Assistant Field Manager - Resources

11/13/01
Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 62025

NM-060-2001-0065

March 2001

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on BLM grazing Allotment #62025.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issuing a 10-year grazing lease. Other future actions such as range improvement projects would be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on public lands on Allotment #62025. The lease would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2 and 4180.1.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1584 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to authorize Julian & George Lopez a grazing lease for 5 cows yearlong at 100% Federal Range for 60 Animal Unit Months (AUMs). The lease would be issued for two separate parcels of public lands in the area of Puerto de Luna, NM.

B. No Lease authorization alternative:

This alternative would not issue a new grazing lease. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land within Allotment #62025.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment #62025 is located in Guadalupe County, with the parcels located approximately six and twelve miles south of Santa Rosa, NM (see map). The allotment consists approximately 480 acres of isolated Public land. The area is flat to gently sloping, rocky, and moderately brushy. The lease for grazing is only for the public land and therefore does not reflect the total number of livestock for the entire ranch unit.

This allotment lies outside of the Roswell Grazing District boundary established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Grazing authorization on Public Lands outside of the Grazing District boundary is governed by Section 15 of the TGA. Overall livestock numbers for the ranch are not controlled under this Section 15 lease. The amount of forage produced on Public land is the determining factor on the number of authorized livestock.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Floodplains, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: The final soil survey has not been completed for Guadalupe county. A draft soil survey for Guadalupe County list the soils as a Regnier-Rock Outcrop - Lacoca Complex along the breaks with 30 to 80 percent slopes for the northern 80-acre parcel. For the southern 400-acre parcel, the survey lists the soils as Palo-Neso Complex (0 to 2 percent slopes) on the highlands, Regnier-Rock Outcrop - Lacoca Complex along the breaks (30 to 80 percent slopes), and Ima-La Lande Fine Sandy Loams (2 to 10 percent slopes) for the lowlands. Runoff is

very rapid and erosion is severe for the breaks soils. Runoff and erosion is moderate for other soils.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the pinyon-juniper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the pinion-juniper community is that the area does have the potential to have pinyon, juniper, or mountain mahogany in the description of the potential plant community. The primary consideration for inclusion into this community type is the influence of topography, elevations, and slopes. This community type has smaller areas that are scattered throughout other types such as grasslands.

A rangeland inventory for vegetation production and ecological range site condition was performed on this allotment in 1991. Analysis of the inventory data indicates that this ecological range site (Breaks, south exposure, CP-2) is producing sufficient usable forage for the proposed 5 Animal Units (AUs) yearlong. Copies of the inventory data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

Noxious and Invasive Weeds: Noxious weeds affect both crops and native plant species in the same way, by out-competing for light, water and soil nutrients. Losses are attributed to decreased quality and quantity of agricultural products due to high levels of competition from noxious weeds and infestations. Noxious weeds can negatively affect livestock productivity by making forage unpalatable to livestock thus decreasing livestock productivity and potentially increasing producer's feed costs. Potential noxious weed species include musk thistle and Russian knapweed. There are no known populations of noxious weeds on the allotment.

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The area supports a number of reptile species. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no threatened or endangered species populations or critical habitat areas within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is operated as a cow/calf operation. The ranch is managed with seasonal grazing. The expiring grazing lease was for 5 AUs yearlong at 100% Public Land for 60 AUMs. Actual livestock numbers on the entire ranch are not controlled by the BLM as explained in the General Setting portion of the Affected Environment section above.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined under the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Recreation opportunities are limited in this grazing allotment because the public has limited physical access to public lands. The parcels of Public lands within this allotment are scattered. Possible puublic access may be from State Road 203 for the parcel of public lands north of Puerto de Luna.

Recreation activities are very limited due to the fact that pubic land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences and the general recreationist is reluctant to use the public lands in fear of being in trespass on private land. Off Highway Vehicle designations for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

10. Cave/Karst: A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. This allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Livestock remove the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling (Stoddart et al. 1975). These effects can lead to reduced infiltration rates and increased runoff. Reduced vegetative cover and increased runoff can result in higher erosion rates and soil losses, making it more difficult to produce forage and to protect the soil from further erosion. These adverse effects can be greatly reduced by maintaining an adequate vegetative cover on the soil (Moore et al. 1979). Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of the nutrient cycling process and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and existing pasture management. Rangeland vegetation inventory data indicates that there is an adequate amount of forage for the proposed number of livestock and for wildlife. The pinion-juniper component of the vegetation can be expected to increase unless it is manipulated by fire, herbicide, or mechanical means.

Noxious and Invasive Weeds: Cattle stocked on the allotment, supplemental feeds, and a variety of equipment may unintentionally contribute to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds. Noxious weed seeds could be carried onto the allotment by livestock, feed and equipment. The main mechanism for seed dispersion is by equipment that were previously used in noxious weed-infested areas.

Infestation of noxious weeds can have a potentially disastrous impacts on biodiversity and natural ecosystems. In order to combat the negative effects of noxious weeds on crop lands, grazing lands and waterways, herbicidal and other weed control strategies can be implemented at further costs to producers and government agencies. Increased cost to producers are eventually borne by consumers. The potential for the dissemination of invasive and noxious weed seed on public lands would remain low on the allotment due to the limited use of the lands and increased public awareness of the noxious weed problem. Any populations of noxious weeds found on the allotment would be treated according to prescribed control methods for the particular species encountered.

3. Wildlife: Livestock and wildlife will continue to compete for forage and browse, although the dietary overlap is not severe. Cover, and other habitat requirements for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. With proper utilization levels there will be adequate cover and forage for wildlife species; resulting in sustainable wildlife populations for those species that occupy the area.

4. T&E species: There would be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or habitat.

5 Livestock Management: Livestock would continue to be grazed under the same management system and the same numbers as authorized under the expiring lease. No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources: The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality: Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during storm event. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would still be within the limits allowed in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has limited legal or physical access to the public lands. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited or non-existent due to land status patterns.

10. Caves/Karst: No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation. The pinion-juniper component of the vegetation will increase under this alternative.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.

4. T&E Species: There would be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or habitat.

5. Livestock Management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. This would have a significant adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)]. The checkerboard land status on the allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the public land and use only the private land.

6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during storm events which are typically high intensity, short duration thunderstorms.

8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

9. Recreation: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

10. Caves/Karst:: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

V. Cumulative Impacts

All of the allotments that have permits/leases with the BLM will have to undergo scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment #62025 is surrounded by allotments that will be

undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the leased numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

VI. Residual Impacts

Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VIII. Conformance with Standards and Guidelines

The condition of the public lands within this livestock grazing allotment has been reviewed for conformance with the Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Currently, the condition of the public lands and the management of livestock grazing conform to the Standards and Guidelines.

The parameters for measuring public land health, however, have yet to be developed for Standards and Guidelines. When these parameters are delineated, the Roswell Field Office will again review the public land health of this allotment and will document its findings in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act. The document would include analysis of any changes from the Proposed Action.

IV. Literature Cited

Moore, E., E. Janes, F. Kinsinger, K Pitney, and J. Sainsbury. 1979. Livestock grazing management and water quality protection - state of the art reference document. EPA 910/9-79-67. Envir. Prot. Agen. Seattle, WA 147 pp.

Stoddart, L.A., A.D. Smith, and T.W. Box. 1975. Range Management. Third Ed. McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York. 532 pp.

X. BLM Team Members

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